

Dawn in Camp

Chap. II

tired and dozed off again. Again I woke, and again I dozed off, till the 281
barking of the dogs became a sort of rising and falling echo in my
tired and sleepy brain. Once I heard the camels, which were kneeling
close behind Salim's tent, jump up in alarm and bolt 50 yards, but
the reassuring voice of Salim calmed them, and I dropped off to sleep
again. Presently I heard him shouting: *Ya Nasir, shunnu illi khawaf*
al bil? (Oh Nasir, what frightened the camels?). *Ma'aku shai*, came
the reply (Nothing at all). I went on dozing the night long, hearing
many and strange sounds, but too tired to move. It is always thus, my
first night with my Badawin friends; I cannot sleep. Before dawn I 512
heard Salim calling to prayer, and shortly afterwards, though it was [782]
still very dark, the goatskin of milk, rocked by one of the women to [252]
make curdled milk (*leben*) and butter, started its song. Rug-rug-rug-
rug, the skin protested, and yet again, Rug-rug-rug. It was the old
sound I knew so well, and it gave me a strange feeling of homeliness
and comfort. They were awake before daylight, these simple people;
they never seem to sleep—they also had prayed, and now they were
watching for the dawn.

Presently I heard the shepherds calling their flocks of sheep to- 512
gether, and the camelmen talking to their camels. Both sheep and 233
camels had slept in the open in front of Salim's and Dhuiwaihi's tents,
the ewes close to their young. *Hirr, hirr*, cried Faláh, as he started
calling the mother sheep to feed their lambs, before going out to
graze for the day. The lambs all began to bleat at once, it was the
hour of their morning meal. After this they will get nothing till night-
fall, so they must drink now deep and well. Presently, with the first
glimmer of dawn the daily counting of the sheep began. Aha! a cry,
"Ya Salim, there are two short. Come quick, a ewe and a lamb are
missing." A hurrying of feet, then eager talking. A further cry, "A 233
wolf, it is a wolf". "A wolf has done this in the night." From right
under their noses, a he- and she-wolf had clearly visited the camp
and carried off the animals in the dark. A quick cast round and the
enemies' pug-marks were found. The he-wolf had cleverly given the
watch-dogs his scent on the side from which the wind was blowing,
and as soon as the dogs had rushed after him into the night his cunning
spouse had crawled close up to the tents on the other side, much as
a cat crouches and creeps after a mouse (except that the wolf seems

Woman's Way

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521 about. Yet gossips they are, and expert in tearing others' reputations.
658 Many a desert tragedy has resulted from too glib a tongue. Ordinary sexual matters are discussed before small children with a frankness
864 and simplicity which modern educationists might approve, but which an English person may find at times embarrassing. The bearing of their young by camels, mares and ewes is not only an everyday topic, but mothers will take their children to watch the progress of such events, alongside their menfolk.

937 On the whole, Badawin women are extremely moral, though they might readily succumb to temptation were it to come their way. Fortunately it does not.

They go in for love affairs, of course, and married women are not above falling desperately in love with other men than their husbands. A woman's only hope in such a case (unless her man happens to be her first cousin) is to tell her husband the whole truth, and beg him to divorce her. This happens fairly often among the rank and file, though not among the senior ladies of the tribe or the shaikh's wives. Sir Richard Burton has said somewhere that among Badawin women who were separated from their menfolk during long absences in the desert when at war, abnormal and unnatural living was not uncommon. This I think a libel, or at least a grave exaggeration.

THE DAILY ROUND OF A BADAWIN FAMILY—"AN AUTUMN STUDY"

132 Time, Early November; Place, Wafra, 30 miles from the sea in the Kuwait Neutral Zone.

[342] The tent is pitched on a slight rise in the ground, so that if rain
● 512 comes the water will not flood the interior. Everyone is busy from earliest dawn to nightfall, especially the women and girls. A little rain has fallen, the first for eight months, and grass has just started sprouting in the hollows. Both camels and sheep are thin and scarcely able to walk any distance. The summer has been a terribly severe one. More rain is urgently needed, else the grass that has come up will wither again. The head of the family has ridden off on his mare the previous evening to see if better grazing exists 10 miles away. He will not be back till sunset to-day.

000 At 4 a.m. one of the men-servants gives the 'adhan (call to prayer),

The Shepherd Boy

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At 4 a.m. one of the men-servants gives the 'adhan (call to prayer) with which the day commences. It is still quite dark, but the prayer-call has roused the camp. The women also pray, but in their own tent. After prayers, the woman whose duty it is to make the daily supply of *leben* (sour milk), starts rocking her goatskin to and fro on the *mirjahah* (wooden tripod from the centre of which it hangs). According to the tribe they belong to, some women sing when at this work, others do not.

The woman of the house then orders a little bitter coffee or tea (a modern innovation) to be prepared and gives some to the shepherd and the camelherd, who with the dawn will start off on their day's duties. With the coffee she hands them a supply of dates; part of this is eaten on the spot and part put into a little leather bag as the day's ration. If coffee or tea is scarce, the men are given a bowl of milk. While this is being done, another servant whose duty later will be to go and fetch water, etc., looses the lambs from inside the tent, where each has been attached by a woollen loop to a central rope during the night, and allows each lamb to be suckled by its mother. This done, the lambs are tied up again. The grown-up animals are counted to see that no wolf has stolen one during the night, and off they are sent to graze in charge of the shepherd boy. As the sheep are weak from lack of fodder and the long summer, they will be sent a couple of miles at most. There the shepherd-boy amuses himself one way or another till the sun gets up and makes him feel inclined to rest. He thereupon plants his staff* in the ground and hangs his 'aldaq on top. This is enough to deceive the sheep into thinking the shepherd is standing near them and watching. They will not wander; the shepherd goes to sleep. There is no danger by day while he is in sight of the camp.

After the sheep go the camels. A few of these, being in extra poor condition as the result of the summer, find difficulty in rising. They are given a mouthful of dates to encourage them; one or two may have to be helped up, protesting with growls and burlblings as their tails are seized and given an upward twist. They are all ready now and the herdsmen burst into song of encouragement and leads the

* Called *midghal*. *Midghal* is the special stick which shepherds keep to hang their 'aldaq on to prevent sheep and lambs from wandering. Every tent has one.

Najdi and Iraq sheep take no notice of the *midghal*, only the black sheep of Ham and Kuwait. [See Bible. "They cool and dry staff, they comfort me"—here "staff" is undoubtedly the Arabian *midghal*.]

The Camelherd

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512 way, riding monkey-like on the hindquarters of one of the better-
233 conditioned animals, and looking as if every minute he would slide
442 off over the animal's tail. The herdman's song is wild and weird,
[635] rising and falling in semitones. As often as not he starts off with a
description of the beautiful grazing that his charges are going to find
ahead of them. He pleads with his camels and says they are to trust
him, their guide and helper. He it is who is leading them to pastures
fair, and grass that is green and succulent. The camels seem to under-
stand, for with sundry groans and moans, they slowly follow him in
single file. As they disappear into the early morning mist, the last you
see or hear of the party is the distant singing of the camelherd. Then
all are swallowed up in the morning fog. Like the sheep, the camels
will not go far. Five to eight miles is their limit just now. Grazing
has been so pitifully scarce in their long summer camp they must
be allowed to get fit slowly; presently they will go further afield.
The camelherd does not sleep by day. His is a much more valuable
herd. He watches, with rifle ready, even though there is not the
slightest rumour of danger or trouble in the air. To while away the
long day, he may look for truffles on the hilltops or occasionally try
and catch a jerboa. In the main, however, he watches and watches till
the time comes to go home.

512 The camels and sheep having gone out to graze and the sun being
244 up, the tent family will have a meagre breakfast consisting of a little
tea without milk, and some dates. If the housewife is in funds she
may issue a small ration of bread to all; more often than not they go
without.

512 The daughter of the house with her small sister, or her girl friend
442 from the neighbour's tent, now starts off to collect brushwood for
313 the day's needs. 'Arfaj is what they seek, and as this has a tough root,
they arm themselves with a small axe and several yards of goat's hair
rope to carry home the firewood on their heads. Other children of
[551] from five to ten years old often accompany the girls to see if they can
find an early flower or a truffle. It is their one way of enjoying them-
selves, they have few other amusements. The girls move off with
strong healthy stride, their long sleeves bound behind their necks to
free their arms, and their skirts hitched up at the waist to give freedom
of movement. How straight and supple they are! Daily this fetching

Fetching Water

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in of firewood goes on, and the girls and children get in a two- or three-mile walk every morning. It is good for them and makes them strong, straight and fit to bear children later on, and they know it.

Two hours later they return, each bearing an enormous load of 'arfaj bushes on their heads, and followed by the tired little wives who have gone with them. In the meantime the woman of the tent has not been idle. She, with her sister, or old mother if she has one to help her, has been sunning the family bedding (*ladf*) and putting it away, or has been cleaning pots and pans from the previous night's meal and has tidied up the tent. She has sent off the spare shepherd to go and fetch water from the wells they have just vacated, perhaps 10 miles back. He takes for the purpose a couple of male camels kept back from the herd, on whom he loads up either two large camel water-skins, or four goatskins. This will suffice for the needs of the tent and its neighbours. Should a small *shamila* exist near them, as is often the case after rains, the daughters of the house will once again be sent off with goatskins (*gawab*) to collect the water—(a *shamila* is a small supply of water lying under the surface of a dry, sandy water-course which does not sink deep and disappear completely, because it lies on subsurface rock or clay). The girls scratch away the sand to a depth of two or three feet to reach the brown, muddy liquid. They ladle it into skins by means of a small cup (*jidda*) of tamarisk wood, and keep it on one side for drinking purposes only. The water is at first opaque and yellowish, but the silt soon settles.

To keep the water-skins cool during the day, a bed of 'arfaj bush is made just outside the women's quarters, and all skins are laid on the bed.

By now it is time to prepare the midday meal. If the family is a fairly prosperous one, rice will be cooked and made tasty with *semen*, clarified butter of sheep's milk, and all will sit down and eat their fill. If the family is a poor one, there will be no meal till sundown.

After the midday meal, the woman of the house will first clean the cooking pots, and then start weaving any cloth that may be required for the tent, or if the tent is complete she will work on a *qata* or *mama*, which in due course she will sell when she visits a town to do *suadhalak*. A *qata* if well and artistically made will bring her in Ra.45 to Ra.50—a vast sum of money for a Badawia family.

The Master's Return

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512 An hour or so before sunset, the tent housewife takes a stroll. She has had a hard day. She enjoys herself with her children for half an hour or so. Before going out she has ordered the household to prepare [415] and fill the *haudh*. This is a large leather drinking trough fixed in basin fashion on a stand of three bent hoops of wood. This is for the sheep when they come home and for the master's mare. There is a good supply of water ready, but the sheep will not need much, for they have been having green grazing. The camels will not yet drink: it is autumn and they will not want water for five days now. It is impossible to water them in camp, so every fifth day the herdsman will take them back, either to the wells they summered on, or to others that may be handy and let them drink their fill (*i-waridun-hum*).

On such journeys the herd will take the spare shepherd with him and he will go equipped with *al haudh* (see above), the *dallu* (small leather bucket), to draw water with, and the *habl* or rope to attach to the bucket. He will also take all spare *garabs* (water-skins) to bring 512 back water to the camp. It is now nearly sunset and all eyes are on 598 the look-out for the return of the master of the house. At last he is seen on the horizon cantering leisurely home. As he nears the tents the dogs begin to bark, the children rush out to meet father and the wife orders coffee to be prepared. His welcome is like that given to a guest, for he will be tired and hungry. As he dismounts, his wife or daughter takes his mare and at once throws over her a *jillal* (blanket) before taking her to water. That duty done, they shackle her with clumsy iron shackles and allow her to go free. If the family is fairly well off, the mare will be given a feed of barley, but the poor man's mare gets nothing.

512 Salutations over and several cups of coffee handed round, the 233 master of the house is asked about the result of his journey. He produces out of the voluminous folds of his *dishdasha* samples of different kinds of grass which he has seen growing at the spot he visited, and which he has brought home to show his wife and herdsman; he praises his new find, he says grazing is good out there, and there is lots of it, and no other Badawin have as yet found it. He has brought good news (*bishdra*), he wants his womenfolk and all the others to rejoice with him for he is a *bashir* (a bringer of good news):

"By God it is excellent, very very excellent, and there are no Arabs

Evening

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on it—Oh my children, oh my servants, we will move to it to-morrow morning.” 512
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Yet what, after all, is this new-found grazing? Nothing but a slightly rained-upon locality, where a few green shoots and weeds wait for man and beast to find them. Yet with the scarcity that prevails, the find is welcome. At sunset the camels once again come home, this time with the herdsman riding behind them. He is no longer singing, but encourages them with a “wa-ho, wa-ho, hurry up my daughters, the night is coming on, ‘tis late—‘tis late”.

On arrival the camels are gently shepherded to the front of the tent where they are encouraged to lie down in a semicircle forming a sort of zarea, with heads all facing the open side of the tent. This for protection, and to give each other warmth, for the tent keeps off the chill night breeze. However cold it is, the camels have no covering on their backs, and they appreciate any shelter they can get from the night wind.

An hour after sunset, and often when it is quite dark, the sheep come in with much “baa-ing” and calling upon their lambs to come out and appease their hunger, for the lambs have been kept at home all day. The sheep are brought into the semicircle formed by the camels, and the lambs are let loose. For twenty minutes or so pandemonium reigns. The babies have to be guided to their mothers, who will accept no lamb but their own, and in the darkness there is much apparent confusion due only to the noise made by ewes and lambs.

The shepherds know their job, and the lambs, having fed, are soon 512 taken back and tied up inside the tent. All this time there are no lights, 378 for the Badawin family cannot afford such luxury. Only in the kitchen portion of the tent a fire is cooking the evening meal and the master of the house sitting in front of the guest portion of his tent has got a small fire going with the embers of dry camel dung. Every now and then he flings on a bunch of ‘arfaj to cause a lïase and show him what is going on.

Supper follows, a simple meal of boiled rice and possibly a little 512 bread. It is washed down with *lelex*, of which master takes long and 244 copious draughts. The women do not eat with him. They have already had their snack. Only the wife sits by her husband to see that he has

Rain!

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512 all he wants. Coffee then goes round, and master, servants and women
264 go early to bed.

132 That night Allah the All-seeing, the All-merciful, is good to his
512 people. As the camp sleeps, a great thundercloud appears and gradually
creeps up from the far north-west. Nearer and nearer it comes till
at 3 a.m. it is exactly overhead. There is a death-like stillness, and
even the camp dogs cease their baying and the sleepers turn uneasily
in their sleep. The air is oppressive, even hot. Suddenly a cold chill
wind begins to blow; the shepherd watching his sheep in front of the
tent wakes his master and whispers, "Allah Kerim, Insha'llah it will
rain, the mercy of God is coming, Oh Allah, give us of thy blessing".
Suddenly there is a soul-raising thunderclap followed by a simulta-
neous blaze of forked lightning, which lights up the whole landscape
a vivid bluey-white. Clap after clap follows; each rolling away in the
distance like salvos of great artillery. Shouts and cries rise from the
camp. The men rush to the camels and sheep, the women to the tent
ropes, and then with a dull roar growing every instant deeper and
closer, the rain comes at last. At first great heavy drops the size of
small saucers, then in a few seconds the downpour. And what a
downpour! Fortunately there is no wind but just a deep booming
roar, as the water pours down in sheets. For ten minutes everyone
holds on to what he can grip, expecting the squall which usually
follows such rain. But none comes. Then cries of joy as the open
spaces round the camp site begin to fill with water. The tents perched
up on higher ground than the surrounding country are safe from
flood, but by 3.30 a.m. the countryside is a vast shallow lake. By
312 3.45 a.m. the rain thins off. Regardless of everything, men, women and
512 children rush forth to collect the delicious rain-water into every kind
of utensil they can lay hands on: water-skins, basins, tins and cooking
pots of every description are made to serve. When these are filled
women and children sit in the water and literally wallow in it for
sheer joy. The men rouse the camels and make them drink knee deep
in the fresh brown sea. Everyone is delirious, for they have been
drinking brackish and even salt water for the last nine months. The
great blessing has come at last. God is great, God is good to the
Muslims. The incongruous part of it all is that it is still pitch dark.

000 No one has a lantern, no one cares. At length dawn breaks. Prayers,

Rejoicing

Chapter III
At length dawn breaks. Prayers,
genuine prayers of heartfelt thanks are said and the storm passes away. ⁵¹²
What a scene daylight brings! Each tent, like a little Noah's ark, is ^[185]
perched safely on its small Ararat, and a sea of fresh water for a couple ¹⁸²
of miles all round gives the appearance of the Flood of Bible story.
Away to the right are some low hills, and to the left one can see the
water tumbling down their sides as the various nullahs *sail* (the Arab
word for running in spate). You can hear the dull roar of these distant
water-courses running full. The summer has ended at long long last.
The Badawin world comes to life and is happy once more. "Now we
shall see the *fayal* (truffles)", cry the delighted children.

(The above was a personal experience of and November, 1933.)